

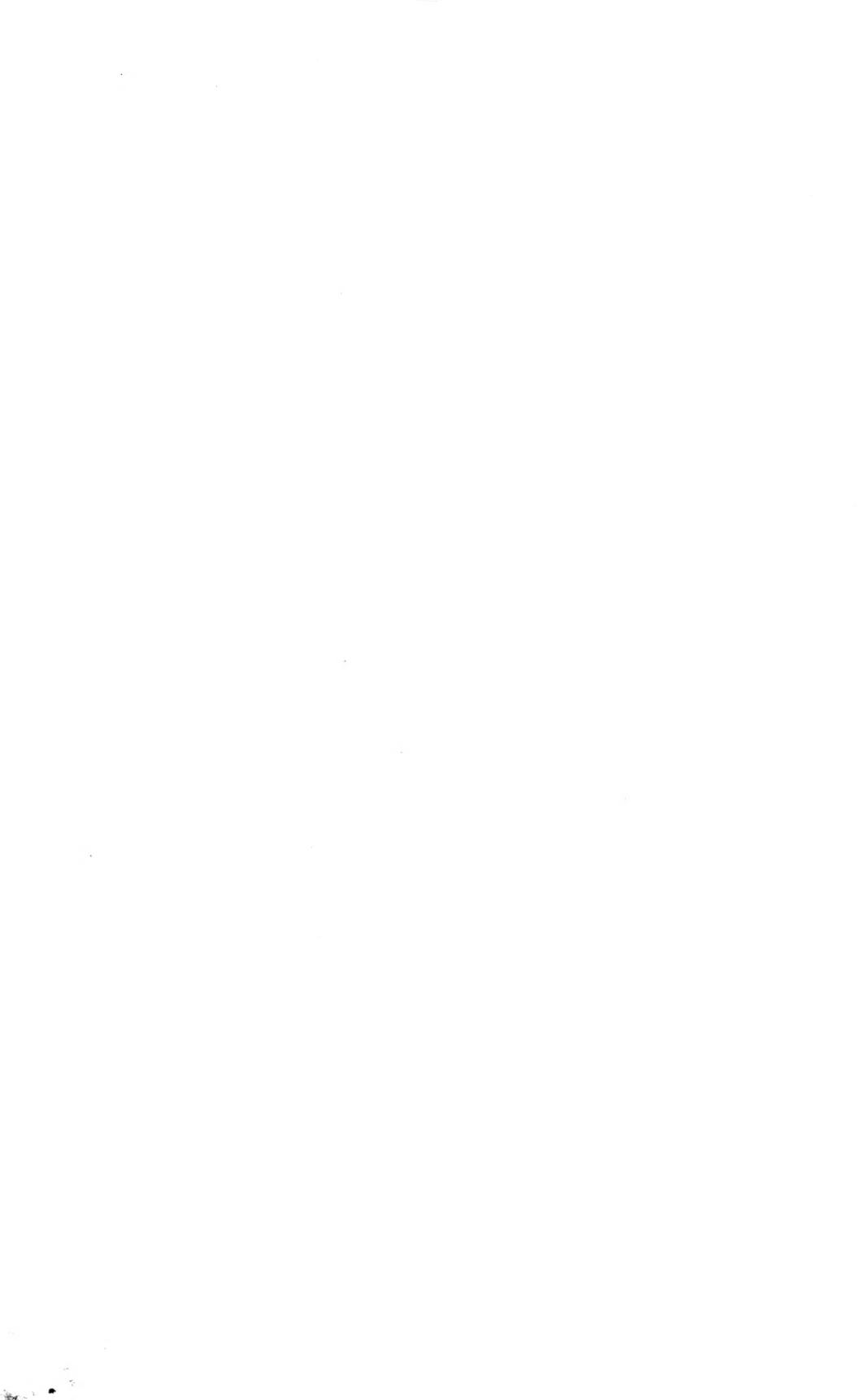




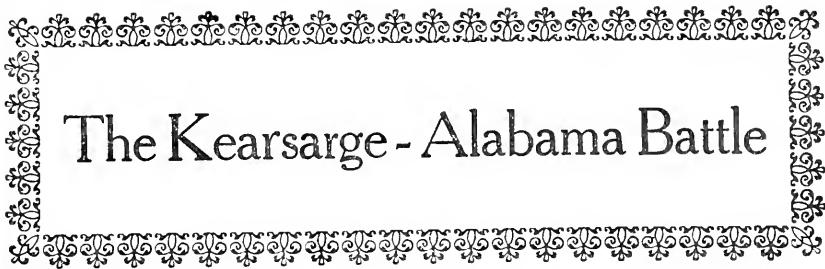
Class E 597

Book A 271





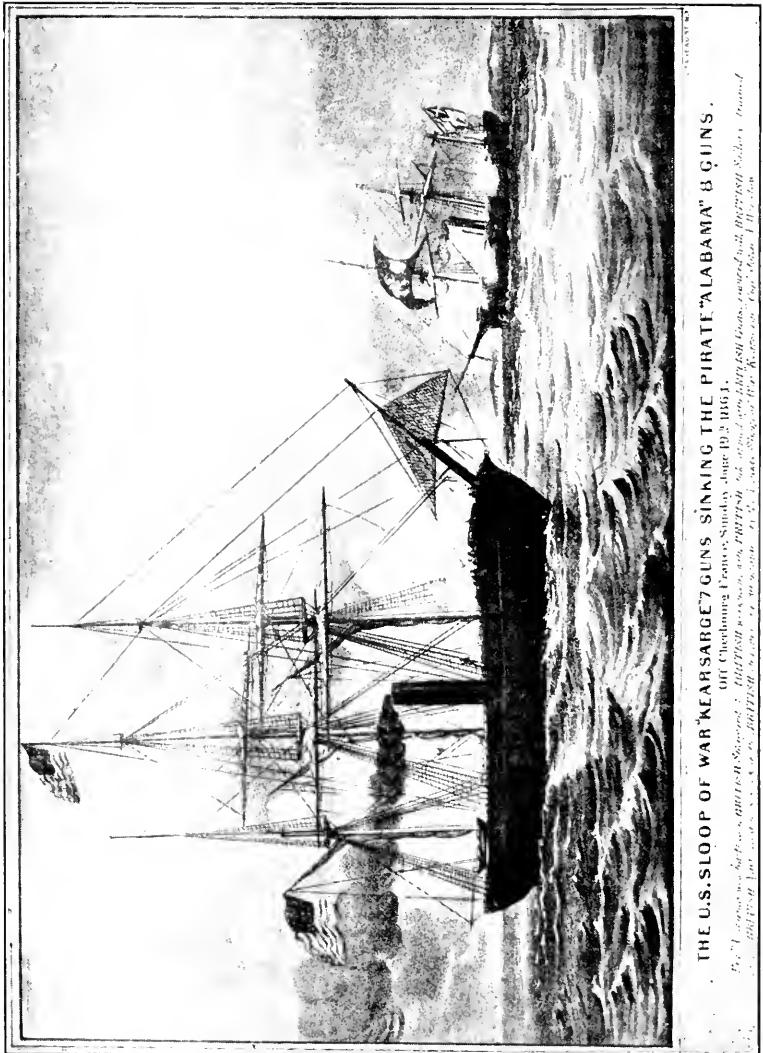




The Kearsarge - Alabama Battle



660
1601



THE U.S. SLOOP OF WAR NEAR SARATOGA SINKING THE PIRATE "ALABAMA" & GUNS.

Off Cherbourg, France, Sunday, June 19, 1863.

The "Alabama" had been captured by the British steamer "Puffing Devil" on June 18, 1863, and was sent to Cherbourg to be broken up. The "Saratoga" had been sent to Cherbourg to intercept her. The "Saratoga" fired 7 guns at the "Alabama" and she sank.

The Kearsarge-Alabama Battle

The Story as told to the writer by James Magee
of Marblehead, Seaman on the Kearsarge.

By FRANCIS B. C. BRADLEE

[Reprinted from the Historical Collections of the Essex Institute, Vol. LVII, 1921.]

ESSEX INSTITUTE
SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS
1921

$E^{\pm 11}$

$\sim 10^{11}$

$\frac{1}{\rho^2 \rho^2}$

536405
22

THE KEARSARGE—ALABAMA BATTLE.

THE STORY AS TOLD TO THE WRITER BY JAMES MAGEE
OF MARBLEHEAD, SEAMAN ON THE KEARSARGE.

BY FRANCIS B. C. BRADLEE.

“After cruising in the English Channel for some time, there was a report that the *Alabama* was expected in some part of England, and as the English press made a great deal of talk about the *Kearsarge*, the Captain proposed to go to Belgium; arriving the 27th of May, 1864, ran into Flushing [Holland] and went into dry dock on the following day, more for a blind than for anything else, as we were never in better repair and running order than at that time. The 29th of May the Captain gave liberty to all on board to go where they pleased, with instructions if they heard a gun and saw the colors at our foremast head, to report on board as quickly as possible, as that would be the signal for sailing orders. All went well until the 10th day of June, when the signal gun was fired. All hands made ready for the ship, and in less than twenty minutes all the crew were ready for duty. The Captain had all hands called to lay aft. He then told us that the *Alabama* had arrived at Cherbourg, France, for repairs, and now was the time for us to strike. Then we gave three cheers, ‘spliced the main brace,’ and the next tide we hauled out of dry dock and put to sea, put another ‘splice in the main brace’ and shaped our course for Dover, England. Arriving there the 11th, at 10 o’clock A. M., took in fresh supplies, and at 12 o’clock weighed anchor and put to sea, shaping our course for Cherbourg.

NOTE. The author does not hold himself responsible for the many bitter remarks concerning Great Britain found in the following narrative. They were the result of the excited feeling in the North, due to the Civil War and the depredations of the Confederate commerce destroyers, but in order to render the story of the “Kearsarge”—“Alabama” battle as vivid as possible it has been thought best to retain the language of the original account.

“Arriving there early on the 12th, we ran into the mouth of the harbor, had a good look at our antagonist, and fired a blank shot, out of politeness, for Semmes to come out, but he did not come out that day. Here we lay off and on, running off by day and standing in by night, close enough to see all that went in and out of the harbor. We had no communication from Cherbourg up to the 16th of June; then three men pulled out from the shore in a boat, about six miles, to where we lay, came alongside, gave a note to the Captain, and then pulled back into port.

“The Captain told the boatswain to pipe all hands aft. He then produced the note, which read thus:

CAPTAIN WINSLOW:

SIR:—I am undergoing a few repairs here which, I hope, will not take longer than the morrow. Then I will come out and fight you a fair and square fight.

Most respectfully yours,

CAPTAIN R. SEMMES.

“Three days after, Sunday, June 19th, the lookout at masthead espied two steamers coming out of Cherbourg harbor, one a long, black, rakish-looking craft, looking very much like the *Alabama*. The officers and men jumped into the rigging, took a good look at both vessels, and pronounced one the *Alabama*; at the same time the other tacked ship and put back into port. The Captain gave orders to beat to quarters, clear ship for action, and man the starboard battery. (We were laying off about six miles from shore.) Captain Winslow gave the chief engineer orders to go ahead slowly, at the same time putting the ship’s head off shore. The *Alabama* gaining on us all the time, they thought we were afraid and were trying to get away from them, but it was not so, we only ran two miles farther out; then, the Captain calling us in neutral waters, ‘put about,’ and stood in to receive her. When within about a mile of her, she fired her bow chaser, the shot dropping very carelessly alongside our forward pivot port within about four feet of our ship’s side, and doing no damage. The next shot she fired struck us in the port

bow and glanced off, doing no harm. She fired some two or three shots very wildly, that went whistling above our mastheads. During this time we did not fire one shot, but when within half a mile we hove round and gave her a broadside. Here we had it, broadside and broadside, both ships under a full head of steam, the *Alabama* firing two or three shots to our one. We engaged her at seven hundred yards, and as we fought in a circle we 'closed in' to about five hundred yards, and held this position for about half an hour. Then, finding that we were getting the best of the fight, the Captain, desiring to bring the thing to an end, closed in to about two hundred and fifty yards, and discharged a full broadside.

"The men seemed to be getting demoralized ; they ran the white flag up in the main rigging and the 'secesh' flag in the fore rigging. The Captain gave orders to cease firing, and on doing so we found that they thought we were off our guard, as they let fly another broadside. One of the shots went through our smoke pipe, and a sixty-eight pounder lodged in our stern post, doing no other damage as it did not explode. We then had orders to engage her ; so we began to decorate her again with our eleven-inch shell. After exchanging two or three broadsides on the second part of the fight, we found that they began to show us the cold shoulder by jumping overboard, not caring to communicate with us any longer, at the same time striking their flag and firing a lee gun as a surrender. They lowered a boat and manned it with three men and pulled toward our ship. They fired one more shot, very wildly, which struck our main-top-gallant mast and checked the halliards, and the flag flew to the breeze. The flag was run up in a ball to the masthead, and orders given to one of the men that if we should go down, to pull the halliards and go down colors flying. We did not fire on them after they struck their flag. The boat from the *Alabama* came alongside, and Lieutenant Wilson delivered up his sword and surrendered the ship, and told the Captain that if he did not make haste and get out boats to save life, that there would be a good many go down in the *Alabama*.

"All our boats were disabled but two. They were lowered and manned. Just as the boats left the ship, the *Alabama* gave two surges forward and down she went. I was in one of the boats that went to pick up the prisoners. As we began to pick them up, we heard them say that they had rather drown than to be hanged on board of that ship. Some of the men we tried to save would throw up their hands and sink down, so we were obliged to take the boat-hook and reach down three or four feet and hook them up, and some were so far gone that they died in the boats. While we were picking up the men, the *Deerhound*, one of the Royal Yacht Squadron, steamed up to within hailing distance of the ship, and the Captain asked him if he would be kind enough to assist in picking up the men and deliver them up to him, as they were his prisoners. He said he would, and steamed in among them and picked up quite a number, and among them was Captain Semmes. He then steamed off as fast as he could, taking advantage while a good part of our men were off in the boats; but if some of the rest on board at the time had had their way, I think one of those eleven-inch shells would have stopped his headway, and perhaps moored him alongside of the *Alabama*. We spent about half an hour in picking up the prisoners, then we 'stood in' for the land, and piped for dinner, and for all hands to 'splice the main brace,' after which we sat down to grub, and feeling pretty well satisfied began to talk over the fight with the Rebs. I heard one of them say he thought if they had boarded us, the result might have been different, as they were so well drilled with small arms. As they continued to boast of what they could do at boarding, we 'turned the tables' by telling them that we still had a reserve force by which we could give them an extra dose if necessity demanded, or, in other words, that we had an appliance by which we could throw scalding water to the distance of sixty feet, and we also told them if at the same time we discharged a whole broadside from our inch guns of grape and canister (as we could do), the probability is, to say the least, that they would be shaken from stem to stern.

"Here we arrived in port, and all hands called to bring ship to anchor, and not till we had arrived here did we learn how it was that the *Alabama*'s men were so willing to drown. The crew told us that Captain Semmes told them if they were taken prisoners by us that every man would hang to the yard arm; and when our boats left our ship to go and pick them up, it chanced that at the same time a man was sent up aloft to reef off a whip on the main yard with which to rig the accommodation ladders, so as to enable visitors to get on board, as we were going into port. When they saw the man up there they thought that what Semmes had told them was correct, and a great many went down with that impression.

"We dropped anchor about two cable lengths astern of the French frigate *Napoleon*, and the gangway dressed to receive visitors on board. Those who came on board told us that the excitement in Cherbourg was great, that there were about forty thousand people who witnessed the fight, and that there was great betting among them as to which should be the victor—ten to five on the *Alabama*, and hard work to get anybody to take a bet at that, all odds being bet on the *Alabama*. The officers and crew of the American ship *Rockingham* also told us of the intimacy of the *Deerhound*. They said that this yacht had brought men from England here who had volunteered their services to help destroy us, and were drilled in Her Majesty's ship *Excellent* as experienced gunners. Not crediting all that these men told, some of our officers went on shore and found from good, reliable sources, that this yacht had brought twenty-five men, twelve of whom had joined the *Alabama*. The *Rockingham* belonged in Maine. She was the last vessel the *Alabama* destroyed,—twelve hours previous to her going in to Cherbourg. These men also told us that what added to the excitement of the battle was, that we were fighting in a circle and apparently got mixed; that it was impossible to tell which one had gone down, even after the fight was over, as the wind was off-shore, so that when we stood in for the land our colors trained aft, and it was impossible to tell who the victor was. We laid here three days, in which our car-

penter repaired all of our damage without any assistance from shore, with the exception of a boiler-maker, who put a patch on our smoke pipe. We got up steam at 3 o'clock P. M., weighed anchor and put to sea, escorted out by a little steam yacht chartered by a party of American gentlemen and their ladies, with a band on board and the American flag flying. The band gave us a number of national airs, and when about three miles off, outside the breakwater, steaming at about six miles an hour, they struck up the "Star Spangled Banner" and gave us three cheers. We then gave her an extra turn ahead that sent us through the water about fifteen knots, leaving them behind us. We dipped our colors, manned the yards, gave three rousing cheers, and bade adieu and a hasty farewell to the coast of France.

"We arrived at Dover, England, early on the 24th, amidst cheer after cheer that went echoing through the lofty white cliffs of Dover from a Highland Regiment and a number of others, whose acquaintance we had made while cruising in the Channel. All were anxiously waiting to learn the correct news of our loss. It had been reported that we had lost twenty-seven men and the *Alabama* had lost eight. This was the first news the English press gave of the fight, and of course they must have known better, as the *Deerhound* brought the news and Captain Semmes, too.

"That an English yacht, one belonging to the Royal Yacht Squadron and flying the white ensign, too, during the conflict, should have assisted the Confederate prisoners to escape after they had formally surrendered themselves, according to their own statements, by firing a lee gun, striking their colors, hoisting a white flag and sending a boat to the *Kearsarge*, some of which signals must have been seen on board the yacht, is most humiliating to the national honor. The movement of the yacht early on Sunday morning was, as before shown, most suspicious, and had our captain followed the advice and reiterated request of the crew and officers, the *Deerhound* might have been lying not far distant from the *Alabama*. The captain could not believe that a gentleman who was asked

by himself to save life would use the opportunity to decamp with the officers and men, who, according to their own act, were prisoners of war. There is a high presumptive evidence that the *Deerhound* was at Cherbourg for the express purpose of rendering every assistance possible to the corsair, and we may be permitted to doubt whether Mr. Lancaster, the friend of Mr. Laird and a member of the Mersey Yacht Club, would have carried us to Southampton if the result of the struggle had been reversed and the *Alabama* had sent the *Kearsarge* to the bottom. The *Deerhound* reached Cherbourg on the 17th of June, and between that time and the night of the 18th a boat was observed from the shore passing frequently between her and the *Alabama*. This I got from men taken from different merchant ships by the *Alabama* and landed in Cherbourg.

"The ship was open for visitors at Dover, and at 8 bells they were shown on board. In less than ten minutes our decks were full of people. Here we lay for several days, with beautiful weather, and our ship thronged with visitors from morning till night. Boats and yachts of all descriptions and steamers from London with bands of music playing 'Yankee Doodle' and other airs for the occasion, all packed to their utmost with ladies and gentlemen, came to visit us, and everybody seemed to be having a good time. We had fiddling and dancing on board and some games of amusement, which gave the whole thing a lively appearance. The poor boatmen wished the thing would hold on three months, for they never made so much money by boating in their lives as they had since we had come. One of our visitors was the Lord Warden. In the course of conversation he said to one of the old salts, 'I suppose you credit our noble *Armstrong* guns for the victory you have won, do you not?' The old salt said, 'My good man, we have no such guns on board here, nothing but good old Yankee guns, and between you and me they are d—d *headstrong* guns!' We lay here till July 9th, 1864, all enjoying a good time as before stated, when the captain's gig or boat came alongside and he came on board. He then

gave orders to the boatswain to pipe all hands to get anchor for the United States and all visitors to leave the ship. Why, my friend, you can just imagine our feelings. Here we were bordering on the fourth year of our cruise, and the last news we had from home was that we should not be called home till the career of the *Alabama* was ended. For some reason or other, this was the first time during the whole cruise that I ever heard anything that sounded musical in our boatswain's voice. The visitors all out of the ship, steam up, and all ready to heave away, and at 11 o'clock A. M., we bent on our long streaming pennant and cat-headed the anchor, manned the yards and gave three cheers, dipped our colors, squared away, steaming about twelve knots an hour, bidding adieu to the people of England and France, homeward bound.

"Such are the facts relating to the memorable action off Cherbourg on the nineteenth of June, eighteen hundred and sixty-four. The *Alabama* went down, riddled through and through with shot and shell, and as she sank beneath the green waves of the English Channel, not a single cheer arose from us of the *Kearsarge*. Our noble Lieutenant Commander, James S. Thornton, gave the command, 'Silence, boys!' and in perfect silence this terror of our American commerce plunged forward twice or thrice and down she went forty fathoms deep in her own waters, and amidst the hideous howls of her officers and crew."

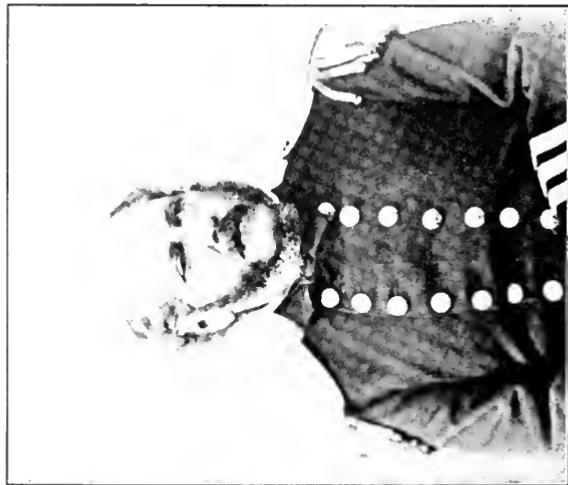
ENGLISH ACCOUNT OF THE BATTLE.

As it will interest Americans to read an Englishman's version of this noted sea fight, a narrative written and published in pamphlet form in England within a few days of the fight, is given. Mr. Magee says : "My countrymen may well look with pride on our brave tars, when their gallantry stands out so conspicuously, even when seen from an Englishman's standpoint."

The importance of the engagement between the United States sloop-of-war *Kearsarge* and the Confederate man-of-war *Alabama* cannot be estimated by the size of the two vessels. The conflict off Cherbourg on Sunday, the



CAPTAIN RAPHAEL SEMMES
of the "Alabama"



CAPTAIN JOHN A. WINSLOW
of the "Kearsarge"

19th of June, was the first decisive engagement between shipping propelled by steam, and the first test of the merits of modern naval artillery. It was, moreover, a contest for superiority between the ordnance of Europe and America, whilst the result furnishes us with data wherewith to estimate the relative advantages of rifled and smooth-bore cannon at short range.

Perhaps no greater or more numerous misrepresentations were ever made in regard to an engagement than in reference to the one in question. The first news of the conflict came to us enveloped in a mass of statements, the greater part of which, not to use an unparliamentary expression, were diametrically opposed to the truth; and although several years have now elapsed since the *Alabama* followed her many defenceless victims to their watery grave, these misrepresentations obtain as much credence as ever. The victory of the *Kearsarge* was accounted for, and the defeat of the *Alabama* excused or palliated, by the following reasons:

1. The superior size and speed of the *Kearsarge*.
2. The superiority of her armament.
3. The chain-plating of her sides.
4. The lack of preparation of the *Alabama*.
5. The greater number of her crew.
6. The assumed necessity (as represented) of Captain Semmes accepting the challenge sent him by the commander of the *Kear-sarge*.

Besides these misstatements, there have been others put forth, either in ignorance of the real facts of the case, or with a purposed intention of diminishing the merit of the victory by casting odium upon the Federals on the score of inhumanity. In the former category must be placed the remarks of the *Times*, June 21; but it is just to state that the observations in question were made on receipt of the first news and from information furnished probably by parties unconnected with the paper, and desirous of palliating the *Alabama's* defeat by any means in their power. We are informed in the article above referred to that the guns of the latter vessel had been pointed for 2,000 yards, and the second shot went

right through the *Kearsarge*, whereas no shot whatever went through as stated. Again, "the *Kearsarge* fired about one hundred (shot), chiefly eleven-inch shell," the fact being that not one-third of her projectiles were of that calibre. Further on we find, "the men (of the *Alabama*) were all true to the last, they only ceased firing when the water came to the muzzles of their guns." Such a declaration as this is laughable in the extreme. The *Alabama*'s guns were all on the spardeck, like those of the *Kearsarge*, and to achieve what the *Times* represented her men must have fought on until the hull of their vessel was two feet under water. The truth is, if the evidence of the prisoners saved by the *Kearsarge* may be taken, Captain Semmes hauled down his flag immediately after being informed by his chief engineer that the water was putting out the fire; and within a few minutes the water gained so rapidly on the vessel that her bow rose slowly in the air, and half her guns obtained a greater elevation than they had ever known previously.

It is unfortunate to find such cheap-novel style of writing in a paper, which at some future period may be referred to as an authoritative chronicler of events now transpiring. It would be too long a task to notice all the numerous misstatements of private individuals and of the English and French press in reference to this action. The best mode is to give the facts as they occurred, leaving the public to judge by internal evidence on which side the truth exists.

The *Kearsarge* in size is by no means the terrible craft represented by those who, for some reason or other, seek to detract from the honor of her victory. She appeared to me a mere yacht in comparison with the shipping around her, and disappointed many of the visitors who came to see her. The relative proportions of the two antagonists were as follows :

| | <i>Alabama</i> | <i>Kearsarge</i> |
|-----------------------------|----------------|------------------|
| Length over all, | 220 feet | 232 feet |
| Length of keel, | 210 " | 198½ " |
| Beam, | 32 " | 33 " |
| Depth, | 17 " | 16 " |
| Horse power, two engines of | 300 each | 400 horse power |
| Tonnage, | 1040 | 1031 |

The *Alabama* was a barque-rigged screw propeller, and the heaviness of her rig, and, above all, the greater size and height of her masts, would give her the appearance of a much larger vessel than her antagonist. The masts of the latter are disproportionately low and small. She has never carried more than topsail yards, and depends for her speed upon her machinery alone. It is to be questioned whether the *Alabama*, with all her reputation for velocity, could in her best trim outsteam her rival. The log book of the *Kearsarge*, which I was courteously permitted to examine, frequently shows a speed of upwards of fourteen knots the hour, and her engineers state that her machinery was never in better working order than at the present time. I have not seen engines more compact in form nor apparently in finer condition, looking in every part as though they were fresh from the workshop, instead of being, as they were, half through the third year of the cruise.

Ships-of-war, however, whatever may be their tonnage, are nothing more than platforms for carrying artillery. The only mode by which to judge of the strength of the two vessels is in comparing their armaments; and herein we find the equality of the antagonists as fully exemplified as in the respective proportions of their hulls and steam power. The armaments of the *Alabama* and *Kearsarge* were as follows:

| <i>Armament of the Alabama.</i> | <i>Armament of the Kearsarge.</i> |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| One 7-inch Blakely rifle | Two 11-inch smooth-bore guns |
| One 8-inch smooth-bore 68 pounder | One 30 pounder rifle |
| Six 32 pounders | Four 32 pounders |

It will therefore be seen that the *Alabama* had the advantage of the *Kearsarge*—at least in the number of her guns, while the weight of the latter's broadside was only some twenty per cent. greater than her own. This disparity, however, was more than made up by the greater rapidity of the *Alabama*'s firing, and, above all, by the superiority of her artillery-men. The *Times* informs us that Captain Semmes asserts "he owes his best men to the training they received on board the *Excellent*;" and trained gunners must naturally be superior to the volun-

teer gunners on board the *Kearsarge*. Each vessel fought all her guns, with the exception in either case of one 32-pounder on the starboard side; but the struggle was really decided by the two 11-inch Dahlgren smooth-bores of the *Kearsarge*, against the 7-inch Blakely rifle and the heavy 68-pounder pivot of the *Alabama*. The *Kearsarge* certainly carried a small rifled 30-pounder in pivot on her forecastle, and this gun was fired several times before the rest were brought into play, but the gun in question was never regarded as other than a failure, and the Ordnance Department of the United States Navy has given up its manufacture.

Great stress has been laid upon the chain-plating of the *Kearsarge*, and it is assumed by interested parties that but for this armour the contest would have resulted differently. A pamphlet published in the city of London, entitled "The Career of the *Alabama*," makes the following statements:—"The Federal Government had fitted out the *Kearsarge*, a new vessel of great speed, iron-coated, etc." (page 23). "She, the *Kearsarge*, appeared to be temporarily plated with iron chains" (page 38). (In the previous quotation it would appear she had been so plated by the Federal Government; both statements are absolutely incorrect, as will shortly be seen.) "It was frequently observed that shot and shell struck against the side of the *Kearsarge* and harmlessly rebounded, bursting outside and doing no damage to the Federal crew. Another advantage accruing from this was that it sunk her very low in the water, so low, in fact, that the heads of the men who were in the boats were on the level of the *Kearsarge's* deck (page 39). As before observed, the sides of the *Kearsarge* were trailed all over with chain cable" (page 41).

The author of the pamphlet in question has judiciously refrained from giving his name. A greater number of more unblushing misrepresentations never were contained in an equal space. In his official report to the Confederate Envoy, Mr. Mason, Captain Semmes makes the following statements:

"At the end of the engagement it was discovered by

those of our officers who went alongside the enemy's ship with the wounded, that her midship section on both sides was thoroughly iron-coated, this having been done with chain constructed for the purpose, placed perpendicularly from the rail to the water's edge, the whole covered over by a thin outer planking, which gave no indication of the armor beneath. This planking had been ripped off in every direction by our shot and shell, the chain broken and indented in many places, and forced partly into the ship's side. She was most effectually guarded, however, in this section from penetration. The enemy was heavier than myself, both in ship, battery and crew, but I did not know until the action was over that she was all iron-clad."

As soon as Captain Semmes reached the *Deerhound* the yacht steamed off at full speed towards Southampton, and Semmes wrote his report of the fight either in England or on board the English vessel. Probably the former, for he dates his communication to Mr. Mason, "Southampton, June 21, 1864." How did he obtain intelligence from those of his officers who went alongside the enemy's ship, and who would naturally be detained as prisoners of war? It was impossible for anybody to reach Southampton in the time specified; nevertheless he did obtain such information. One of his officers, George T. Fullam, an Englishman, unfortunately came to the *Kearsarge* in a boat at the close of the action, representing the *Alabama* to be sinking, and that if the *Kearsarge* did not hasten to get out boats to save life, the crew must go down with her. Not a moment was to be lost, and he offered to go back to his own vessel to bring off prisoners, pledging his honor to return when the object was accomplished. After picking up several men struggling in the water, he steered directly for the *Deerhound*, and on reaching her actually cast his boat adrift. It was subsequently picked up by the *Kearsarge*. Fullam's name appears amongst the list of saved by the *Deerhound*, and he, with others of the *Alabama*'s officers who had received a similar permission from their captors, and had similarly broken their troth, of course gave the above information to their veracious captain.

The chain-plating of the *Kearsarge* was decided upon in this wise: The vessel lay off Fayal towards the latter part of April, 1863, on the lookout for a notorious blockade-runner named the *Juno*. The *Kearsarge* was short of coal and fearing some attempts at opposition on the part of her prey, the executive officer of the sloop, Lieutenant Commander James S. Thornton suggested to Captain Winslow the advisability of hanging her spare anchor-cable over her sides, so as to protect her midship section. Mr. Thornton had served on board the flagship of Admiral Farragut, the *Hartford*, when she and the rest of the Federal fleet ran the forts of the Mississippi to reach New Orleans, and he made the suggestion at Fayal through having seen the advantage gained by it on that occasion. I now copy the following extract from the log-book of the *Kearsarge*:

Horta Bay, Fayal, May 1st, 1863.

From 8 to Merid. Wind, E. N. E. (F. 2). Weather, b. c. Strapped, loaded and fused (5 sec fuse), 13 11-inch shell. Commenced armor plating ship, using sheet chain. Weighed kedge anchor.

Signed, E. M. STODDARD, Acting Master.

This operation of chain-armoring took three days, and was effected without assistance from the shore and at an expense of material of seventy-five dollars. In order to make the addition less unsightly, the chains were boxed over with inch-dealboards, forming a case or box, which stood out at right angles from the vessel's sides. This box would naturally excite curiosity in every port where the *Kearsarge* touched, and no mystery was made as to what the boarding covered. Captain Semmes was perfectly cognizant of the entire affair, notwithstanding his shameless assertion of ignorance; for he spoke about it to his officers and crew several days prior to the 19th of June, declaring that the chains were only attached together with rope-yarns and would drop into the water when struck with the first shot. I was so informed by his own wounded men, lying in the naval hospital at Cherbourg. Whatever might be the value for defence of this chain-plating, it was only struck once during the engagement, so far as I could discover by a long and close inspection.

Some of the officers of the *Kearsarge* asserted to me that it was struck twice, while others deny that declaration; in one spot, however, a 32-pounder shot broke in the deal-covering and smashed a single link, two-thirds of which fell into the water.

Had the cable been struck by the rifled 120-pounder instead of by a 32, the result might have been different, but in any case the damage would have amounted to nothing serious, for the vessel's side was hit five feet above the water line and nowhere in the vicinity of the boilers or machinery. Captain Semmes evidently regarded this protection of the chains as little worth; for he might have adopted the same plan before engaging the *Kearsarge*, but he confined himself to taking on board one hundred and fifty tons of coal as a protection to his boilers, which, in addition to the two hundred tons already in his bunkers, would bring him pretty low in the water. The *Kearsarge*, on the contrary, was deficient in her coal, and she took what was necessary on board during her stay at Cherbourg.

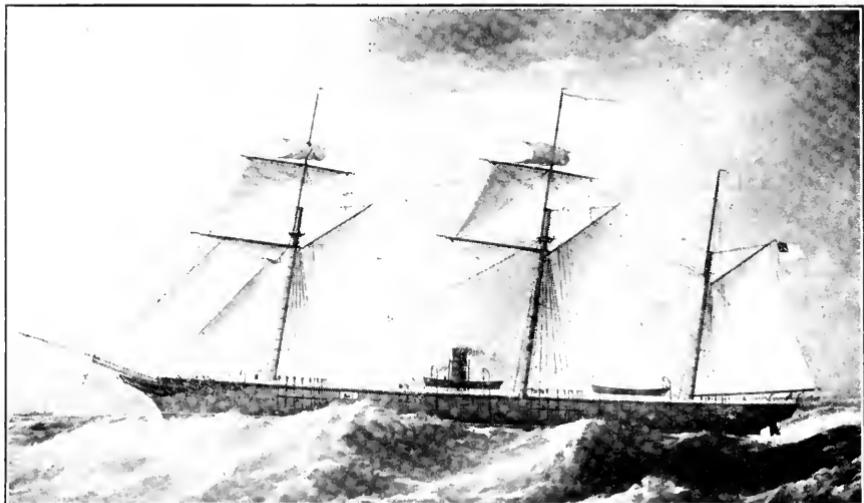
The quantity of chain used on each side of the vessel in this much-talked-of armoring is only one hundred and twenty fathoms, and it covers a space amidships of forty-nine feet six inches in length by six feet two inches in depth. The chain, which is single, not double, was and is stopped by eye-bolts with rope-yarn and by iron clogs. Is it reasonable to suppose that this plating of one and seven-tenths inch iron (the thickness of the links of the chain) could offer serious resistance to the heavy 68-pounder and the 7-inch Blakely rifle of the *Alabama*, at the comparatively close range of seven hundred yards? What, then, becomes of the mistaken remark of the *Times* that the *Kearsarge* was provided, as it turned out, with some special contrivances for protection, or Semmes' declaration that she was iron-clad?

The "Career of the *Alabama*," in referring to this chain-plating, says: "Another advantage accruing from this was that it sank her very low in the water, so low, in fact, that the heads of the men who were in the boats were on the level of the *Kearsarge's* deck." It is simply

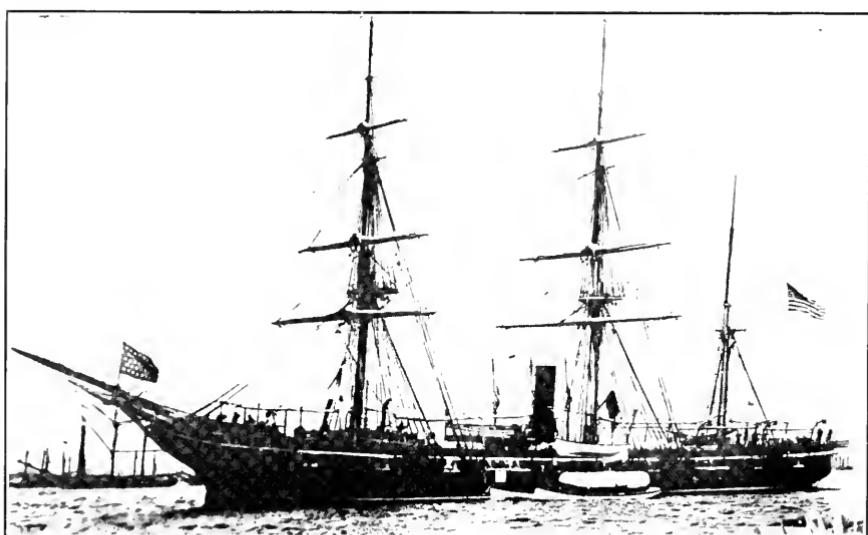
ridiculous to suppose that the weight of two hundred and forty fathoms of chain could have any such effect upon a vessel of one thousand tons' burden, whilst, in addition, the cable itself was part of the ordinary gear of the ship. Further, the *Kearsarge* was deficient in seventy tons of coal of her proper supply at the time of action, while the *Alabama* had three hundred and fifty tons on board.

The objection that the *Alabama* was short-handed does not appear to be borne out by the facts of the case, while on the other hand a greater number of men than were necessary to work the guns and ship would be more of a detriment than a benefit to the *Kearsarge*. The latter vessel had twenty-two officers on board and one hundred and forty men; the *Alabama* is represented to have had only one hundred and twenty in her crew (Mr. Mason's statement); but if her officers be included in this number, the assertion is obviously incorrect, for the *Kearsarge* saved sixty-seven, the *Deerhound* forty-one, and the French pilot boats twelve, and this without mentioning the thirteen accounted for as killed and wounded and others who went down with the ship. If Captain Semmes' representations were correct in regard to his being short-handed, he certainly ought not to be trusted with the command of a vessel again, however much he may be esteemed by some parties for his Quixotism "in challenging an antagonist (to use his own words) heavier than myself both in ship, battery and crew."

The assertion that the *Alabama* was unprepared is about as truthful as the other representations, if we may take Captain Semmes' report and certain facts in rebutting evidence. The captain writes to Mr. Mason: "I cannot deny myself the pleasure of saying that Mr. Kell, my first lieutenant, deserves great credit for the fine condition in which the ship went into action." But if Captain Semmes was right in the alleged want of preparation, he himself is alone to blame. He had ample time for protecting his vessel and crew in all possible manners; he, not the *Kearsarge*, was the aggressor, and but for his forcing the fight the *Alabama* might still be riding inside Cherbourg breakwater. Notwithstanding the horrible cause for which



THE CONFEDERATE STATES STEAMER "ALABAMA"
From the painting by Walters



THE UNITED STATES SLOOP-OF-WAR "KEARSARGE"

he was struggling, and the atrocious depredations he has committed upon helpless merchantmen, we can still admire the daring he evinced in sallying forth from a secure haven and gallantly attacking his opponent, but when he professes ignorance of the character of his antagonist, and unworthily attempts to disparage the victory of his foe, we forget all our first sympathies, and condemn the moral nature of the man, as he has forced us to do his judgment. Nor must it be forgotten that the *Kearsarge* has had fewer opportunities for repairs than the *Alabama*, and that she has been cruising around in all seas for a much longer period than her antagonist. The *Alabama*, on the contrary, had lain for many days in Cherbourg, and she only steamed forth when her captain supposed her to be in at least as good a condition as the enemy.

Finally, the challenge to fight was given by the *Alabama* to the *Kearsarge*, not by the *Kearsarge* to the *Alabama*. The "Career of the *Alabama*," above referred to, makes the following romantic statement:

"When he (Semmes) was challenged by the commander of the *Kearsarge*, everybody in Cherbourg, it appears, said it would be disgraceful if he refused the challenge, and this, coupled with his belief that the *Kearsarge* was not so strong as she really proved to be, made him agree to fight."

The "Career of the *Alabama*" gives a letter from her surgeon addressed to a gentleman in the city of London. The letter reads as follows :

CHERBOURG, June 14, 1864.

DEAR TRAVERS:

Here we are. I send this by a gentleman coming to London. An enemy is outside. If she only stays long enough, we go out and fight her. If I live, expect to see me in London shortly. If I die, give my best love to all who know me.

If Monsieur A. de Caillet should call on you, please show him every attention.

I remain, dear Travers, ever yours,

D. H. LLEWELLYN.

There were two brave gentlemen on board the *Alabama*—poor Llewellyn, who nobly refused to save his own life

by leaving his wounded, and a young lieutenant, Mr. Joseph Wilson, who honorably delivered up his sword on the deck of the *Kearsarge*, when the other officers threw theirs into the water.

The most unanswerable proof of Captain Semmes having challenged the commander of the *Kearsarge* is to be found in the following letter addressed by him to the Confederate consul, or agent, at Cherbourg.

After the publication of this document, it is to be hoped we shall hear no more of Captain Winslow's having committed such a breach of discipline and etiquette as that of challenging a rebel against his government.

C. S. S. ALABAMA, CHERBOURG, June 14, 1864.

TO AD. BONFILS, Esq., Cherbourg:

SIR:—I hear that you were informed by the United States consul that the *Kearsarge* was to come to this port solely for the prisoners captured by me, and that she was to depart in twenty-four hours. I desire you to say to the United States consul that my intention is to fight the *Kearsarge* as soon as I can make the necessary arrangements. I hope these will not detain me more than until to-morrow evening, or after the morrow morning at farthest. I beg she will not depart before I am ready to go out.

I have the honor to be,

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

R. SEMMES, Captain.

Numerous facts serve to prove that Captain Semmes had made every preparation to engage the *Kearsarge*, and that widespread publicity had been given to his intention. As soon as the arrival of the Federal vessel was known at Paris, an American gentleman of high position came down to Cherbourg, with instructions for Captain Winslow; but so desirous were the French authorities to preserve a really honest neutrality, that permission was only granted to him to sail to her after his promising to return to shore immediately on the delivery of his message. Once back in Cherbourg, and about to return to Paris, he was advised to remain over night, as the *Alabama* intended to fight the *Kearsarge* next day (Sunday). On Sunday morning an excursion train arrived from the capitol, and the visitors were received at the terminus of

the railway by the boatmen of the port, who offered them boats for the purpose of seeing a genuine naval battle, which was to take place during the day. Turning such a memorable occurrence to practical uses, Monsieur Rondin, a celebrated photographic artist on the Place d'Armes at Cherbourg, prepared the necessary chemicals, plates and camera, and placed himself on the summit of the old Church tower, which the whilom denizens of Cherbourg had very properly built in happy juxtaposition with his establishment. I was only able to see the negative, but that was quite sufficient to show that the artist had obtained a very fine view indeed of the exciting contest.

At the expiration of one hour and two minutes from the first gun, the *Alabama* hauled down her colors and fired a lee gun (according to the statements of her officers), in token of surrender. Captain Winslow could not, however, believe that the enemy had struck, as his own vessel had received so little damage, and he could not regard his antagonist as much more injured than himself; and it was only when a boat came off from the *Alabama* that her true condition was known. The 11-inch shell from the *Kearsarge*, thrown with fifteen pounds of powder at seven hundred yards' range, had gone clean through the starboard side of the steamer, bursting in the port side and tearing great gaps in her timber and planking. This was plainly obvious when the *Alabama* settled by the stern and raised the fore part of her hull high out of water.

The *Kearsarge* was struck twenty-seven times during the conflict, and fired in all one hundred and seventy-three (173) shots. These were as follows:

Shots Fired by the Kearsarge.

| | |
|-------------------------------|----------|
| Two 11-inch guns..... | 55 shots |
| Rifle on forecastle..... | 48 " |
| Broadside 32-pounders..... | 60 " |
| 12-pounder boat-howitzer..... | 10 " |
| | —. |
| Total..... | 173 " |

The last named gun performed no part whatever in sinking the *Alabama*, and was only used in the action to

create laughter among the sailors. Two old quartermasters, the two Dromios of the *Kearsarge*, were put in charge of this gun, with instructions to fire when they received the order. But the two old salts, little relishing the idea of having nothing to do while their messmates were so actively engaged, commenced peppering away with their pea-shooter of a piece, alternating their discharges with vituperation of each other. This low comedy by-play amused the ship's company, and the officers good-humoredly allowed the farce to continue until the single box of ammunition was exhausted.

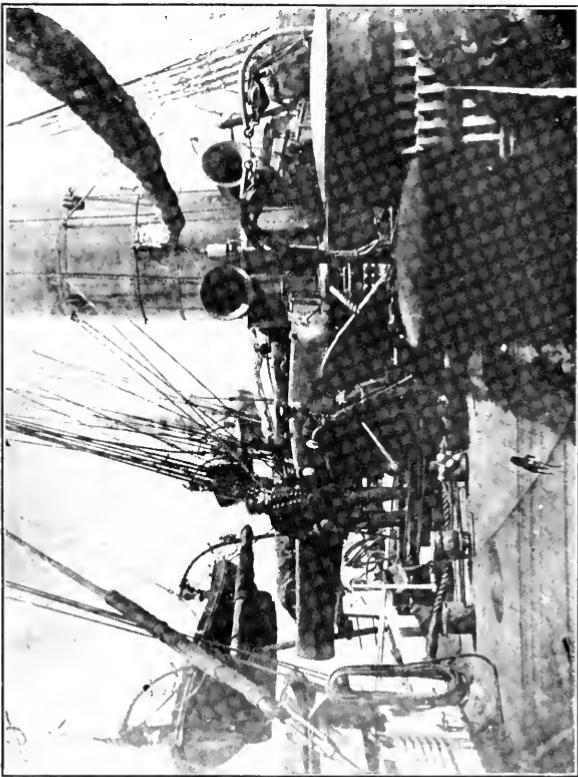
The *Kearsarge* was struck as follows :

One shot through starboard quarter, taking a slanting direction aft, lodging in the rudder post. This shot was from the Blakely rifle. One shot, carrying away starboard lifebuoy. Three 32-pounder shots through port bulwarks, forward of mizzen-mast.

A shell, exploding after end of pivot port. A shell, exploding after end of chain-plating. A 68-pounder shell, passing through starboard bulwarks below main-rigging, wounding three men.

A Blakely rifle shell, passing through the engine room skylight, and dropping harmlessly into the water beyond the vessel. Two shots below plank-sheer, abreast of boiler-hatch. One, forward pivot port plank-sheer. One, forward foremast rigging. A shot, striking launch's spring-lift. A rifle shell, passing through funnel, bursting, without damage, inside. One, starboard forward main-shroud. One, starboard after shroud, maintopmast rigging. One, maintopsail tie. One, maintopsail outhaul. One, maintopsail runner. Two, through port quarter boat. One, through spanker (furled). One, starboard forward shroud, mizzen rigging. One, starboard mizzen-topmast backstay. One, through mizzen peak signal halyards, which cut the stops when the battle was nearly over, and for the first time let loose the flag to the breeze.

This list of damages received by the *Kearsarge* proves the exceedingly bad fire of the *Alabama*, notwithstanding the number of men on board the latter belonging to the "Naval Reserve" and the trained hands from the gunnery



"'CANONS DE TRI BORD DU KEARSARGE'"

From a negative made in Cherbourg after the Battle

ship *Excellent*. I was informed by some of the paroled prisoners on shore at Cherbourg that Captain Semmes fired rapidly at the commencement of the action, "in order to frighten the Yankees," nearly all the officers and crew being, as he was well aware, merely volunteers from the merchant service. At the expiration of twenty minutes after the *Kearsarge* discharged the first broadside, continuing the battle in a leisurely, cool manner, Semmes remarked: "Confound them; they've been fighting twenty minutes, and they're as cool as posts."

From the time of her first reaching Cherbourg until she finally quitted the port, the *Kearsarge* never received the slightest assistance from shore, with the exception of that rendered by a boiler-maker in patching up her funnel. Every other repair was completed by her own hands, and she might have crossed the Atlantic immediately after the action without difficulty. So much for Mr. Lancaster's statement that "the *Kearsarge* was apparently much disabled."

The first accounts received of the action led us to suppose that Captain Semmes' intention was to lay his vessel alongside of us, and to carry her by boarding. Whether this information came from the captain himself, or was made out of "whole cloth" by some of his admirers, I do not know. The idea of boarding a vessel under steam,—unless her engines, or screw, or rudder be disabled,—is manifestly ridiculous. The days of boarding are gone by, except under the contingencies above stated; and any such attempt on the part of the *Alabama* would have been attended with disastrous results to herself and crew. To have boarded the *Kearsarge*, Semmes must have possessed greater speed to enable him to run alongside of her; and the moment the pursuer came near her victim, the latter would shut off steam, drop astern in a second of time, sheer off, discharge her whole broadside of grape and canister, and rake her antagonist from stem to stern. Our pro-Southern sympathizers really ought not to make their protege appear ridiculous by ascribing to him such an egregious intention.

The *Kearsarge* had three men wounded by the same shot, a 68-pounder, which passed through the starboard bulwarks

below main-rigging, narrowly escaping the after 11-inch pivot gun. The fuses employed by the *Alabama* were villainously bad, several shells having lodged in the *Kearsarge* without taking effect. Had the 7-inch rifle shot exploded, which entered the vessel at the starboard quarter, raising the deck by its concussion several inches and lodging in the rudder-post, the action might have lasted some time longer. It would not, however, have altered the result, for the casualty occurred toward the close of the conflict. The officer in charge of the piece informed me that the concussion actually raised the gun and carriage ; and, had it exploded, many of the crew would have been injured by the fragments and splinters.

Among the incidents of the fight, the *Times* relates that an 11-inch shell from the *Kearsarge* fell upon the deck of the *Alabama*, and was immediately taken up and thrown overboard. Probably no fight ever occurred in modern times in which somebody didn't pick up a live shell and throw it out of harm's way ; but we may be permitted to doubt in this case. Five-second fuses take effect somewhat rapidly ; the shot weighs considerably more than a hundred weight, and is uncomfortably difficult to handle. Worse than all for the probabilities of the story, fifteen pounds of powder—never more nor less—were used to every shot fired from the 11-inch pivots, the *Kearsarge* only opening fire from them when within eight hundred yards of the *Alabama*. With fifteen pounds of powder and fifteen degrees of elevation, I have myself seen these 11-inch Dahlgrens throw three and one-half miles ; and yet we are asked to credit that, with the same charge, at less than half a mile, one of the shells fell upon the deck of the *Alabama*. There were eleven marines in the crew of the *Kearsarge* ; probably the story was made for them.

Captain Semmes makes the following statement in his official report :

“Although we were now but four hundred yards from each other, the enemy fired upon me five times after my colors had been struck. It is charitable to suppose that a ship of war of a Christian nation could not have done this intentionally.”

A very nice appeal, after the massacre of Fort Pillow, especially when coming from a man who had spent the previous two years of his life in destroying unresisting merchantmen.

The captain of the *Kearsarge* was never aware of the *Alabama* having struck until a boat put off from her to his own vessel. Prisoners subsequently stated that she had fired a lee gun, but the fact was not known on board the Federal ship, nor that the colors were hauled down in token of surrender. A single fact will prove the humanity with which Captain Winslow conducted the fight. At the close of the action his deck was found to be literally covered with grape and canister, ready for close quarters; but he had never used a single charge of all this during the contest, although within capital range for employing it.

Captain Semmes put in the custom house the following valuables: 38 kilo. 700 gr. of gold coin, 6 gr. of jewelry and set diamonds, 2 gold watches.

What, then, became of the pillage of a hundred merchantmen, the chronometers, etc., which the *Times* describes as the "spolia opima of a whole mercantile fleet?" These could not be landed on French soil, and were not; did they go to the bottom with the ship herself, or are they saved? Captain Semmes' preparations were apparently completed on the 16th, but still he lingers behind the famous breakwater, much to the surprise of his men. The *Deerhound* arrives at length, and the preparations are rapidly completed. How unfortunate that Mr. Lancaster did not favor the *Times* with a copy of his log-book from the 12th to the 19th of June inclusive.

The record of the *Deerhound* is suggestive on the morning of that memorable Sunday. She steams out from behind the Cherbourg breakwater at an early hour, scouts hither and thither, apparently purposeless, runs back to her anchorage, precedes the *Alabama* to sea, is the solitary and close spectator of the fight, whilst the *Couronne* has the delicacy to return to port, and finally, having picked up Semmes, thirteen of his officers and a few of his men, steams off at fullest speed to Southampton, leav-

ing the “apparently much disabled *Kearsarge*” (Mr. Lancaster’s own words) to save two-thirds of the *Alabama*’s crew struggling in the water.

An English gentleman’s yacht playing tender to a corsair! No one will ever believe that *Deerhound* to be thoroughbred.

Officers of the U. S. S. Kearsarge.

| | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| John A. Winslow..... | Captain |
| James S. Thornton..... | 1st Lieutenant |
| John M. Browne..... | Surgeon |
| John Adams Smith..... | Paymaster |
| William H. Cushman..... | Chief Engineer |
| James R. Wheeler..... | Acting Master |
| Eben M. Stoddard..... | “ “ “ |
| David H. Sumner | “ “ “ |
| William H. Badlam..... | 2d Assistant Engineer |
| Fred. L. Miller..... | 3d “ “ |
| Sidney L. Smith..... | 3d “ “ |
| Henry McConnell..... | 3d “ “ |
| Edward E. Preble..... | Midshipman |
| David B. Sargent..... | Paymaster’s Clerk |
| S. E. Hartwell..... | Captain’s Clerk |
| Frank A. Graham..... | Gunner |
| James C. Walton..... | Boatswain |
| William H. Yeaton..... | Acting Master’s Mate |
| Charles H. Danforth..... | “ “ “ |
| Ezra Bartlett..... | “ “ “ |

Officers of the Confederate States Steamer Alabama.

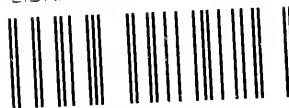
| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Raphael Semmes..... | Captain, Maryland |
| John McIntosh Kell..... | 1st Lieutenant, Georgia |
| Richard F. Armstrong..... | 2d Lieutenant, Georgia |
| Joseph F. Wilson..... | 3d Lieutenant, Florida |
| John Low..... | 4th Lieutenant, England (was not in the battle) |
| Arthur Sinclair..... | 5th Lieutenant, Virginia |
| Irvine S. Bulloch..... | Master, Georgia |
| Becket K. Howell..... | Lieutenant of Marines, Louisiana |
| Francis L. Galt..... | Surgeon and Acting Paymaster, Virginia |
| David Herbert Llewellyn..... | Assistant Surgeon, England |
| Miles J. Freeman..... | Chief Engineer, England |
| Wm. P. Brooks..... | 1st Asst. Engineer, South Carolina |

| | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Matthew O'Brien..... | 2d Asst. Engineer, Ireland |
| William Robertson..... | 3d Asst. Engineer, England |
| Baron Maximilian von Meulnier..... | Master's Mate, Prussia |
| Julius Schroeder..... | " " " |
| James Evans..... | Master's Mate, South Carolina |
| George T. Fulham..... | Master's Mate, England |
| Thomas C. Cuddy..... | Gunner, South Carolina |
| W. Breedlove Smith..... | Captain's Clerk |
| Simeon W. Cummings..... | 3d Assistant Engineer, Connecticut |
| John Pundt..... | 3d Assistant Engineer, South Carolina |
| Wm. H. Sinclair..... | Midshipman, Virginia |
| E. M. Anderson..... | " Georgia |
| E. A. Maffitt..... | " Georgia |
| Henry Alcott..... | Sailmaker, England |

There had been, also, another officer on the *Alabama*, the paymaster, a man named Yonge. He seems to have been a poor stick, a hard drinker, neglecting his duty, and generally behaving in a most disreputable manner. While the *Alabama* was at Kingston, Jamaica, Yonge deserted, apparently to the satisfaction of all the other officers. A Southerner born and bred, he owed to the flag an allegiance that was not to be expected of the men of the crew ; these were mostly English (with a generous sprinkling of ex-man-of-war's men among them), with a few Irish, Danes, and one Russian or Finn.

When the *Alabama* went into commission on the high seas near the Azores, on Sunday, August 24, 1862, and Captain Semmes made a speech to the crew, he talked precisely as if he were commanding an English man-of-war. He spoke of the glory won by British seamen, their hatred of oppression, and told of the horrors of war as waged by the North against the Confederacy, and indicated the grand career before them. Here was Captain Semmes, who had commanded a United States man-of-war, addressing his crew as Englishmen, and urging them to do their best to injure and disgrace his own countrymen. No British officer would have done that, I believe, under any circumstances.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 013 709 456 3